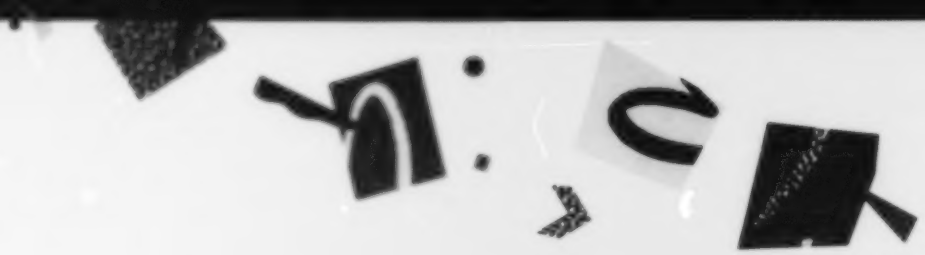

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Learning for Living: Strategies for Promoting Family Development

F. June Morgan, Ph.D.
F.J. Morgan Enterprises

The judgements and opinions reflected in this paper are solely the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the Alberta Government.

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Abstract

This paper discusses learning as a tool for family development. Within the context of predictable and non-predictable events in families, the problems of inconsistency in children's learning and incongruity in children's development are presented. Examples of incongruence and inconsistency are provided to support the need for the development of continuous learning and congruent development of skills and behaviours in children as they grow and mature to adulthood.

Learning is presented as a process leading to change in behaviour. Lifelong learning is promoted as the best possible strategy to prepare individuals and families to cope with ongoing change, and to manage predictable and non-predictable events in their lives. A model for using lifelong learning as a tool for family development is presented for discussion purposes.

Family Development Overview

The world we live in today is characterized on all fronts by continuous change. An historical review of family literature describes many aspects of family life that are not applicable today. For example, before the 1950's, divorce was not a predictable or acceptable event in family life, nor were the notions of dual careers, single parent families, inter-ethnic marriages, or invitro fertilization for childbearing. As families enter the 1990's, family life will include dual careers, divorce, remarriage, blended families, surrogate motherhood, increased mobility, and single parenthood.

This paper proposes the use of a lifelong learning model and lifelong learning strategies as tools for individual and family development. The basis for the model is Stinnett's statement that "Strong families are the roots of our well being as individuals and as a society" (Mace, Ed. 1983:32).

What is a family? Attempts have been made to define family in various ways but the most useful definition seems to focus on the function of the family. This allows us to look at families from the perspective of change and growth, to think about families developing through life cycles, mastering current tasks or events and preparing for new events.

"Since there is no longer a single definition for family that is universally acceptable, 'there can be no one type of universally effective family support and education program'."

Since there is no longer a single definition for family that is universally acceptable, "there can be no one type of universally effective family support and education program" (Weiss and Jacobs, 1988:xxiv). Consequently, effective family support and education programs must meet family as well as individual growth and learning needs when they are required, in a manner in which the learner finds useful, with content which is applicable to the individual's situation, and at a time during the day which fits the learner's schedule.

As McClusky (1974:101) has pointed out, "continuous change requires continuous learning" and that is the basis for the lifelong learning model proposed in this paper.

Understanding Families and Family Development

"Family development is a continuous process concerned with the management of predictable and non-predictable events by family members over time."

Family development is a continuous process concerned with the management of predictable and non-predictable events by family members over time. Predictable events include marriage, birth, child development, launching children, the empty nest, job changes, old age, marriage of children, birth of grand children, death from old age and so on. Non-predictable events include early death of a spouse, divorce of parents or grand parents, death of a child, migration, and dual career families living apart. Financial events such as bankruptcy or a major lottery would also be included in this category.

"Stages" is the terminology now used to explain the process of family development and "stress" is used to describe what occurs when families move from one stage to another. Families tend to develop through stages just as individuals do, as documented by Gail Sheehy in Passages (1976), as well as Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson.

Margaret Arcus (1987), in her model "A Framework for Life-Span Family Life Education", describes three broad age-based stages in the family life cycle: children, adolescents and adults. Arcus chose these broad stages because "intellectual, emotional and social readiness for this learning are not tied to specific ages." Arcus includes communicating, decision making and problem solving among the basic processes necessary for families to make effective transitions from one stage to the next.

Life Cycles

Research on family life cycles has been completed by both Duvall (1977) and Carter and McGoldrick (1989). Both authors provide multi-stage models of the family life cycle in which emotional change is important in the developmental process of moving from one stage to another. Common stages in these models include marriage, the birth and raising of children, the departure of children from the household, retirement and death.

"When compared to other organizations of two or more people, families have different properties. Families incorporate new members only by birth, adoption or marriage. Members leave only by death. They cannot resign or dissolve the system."

When compared to other organizations of two or more people, families have different properties. Families incorporate new members only by birth, adoption or marriage. Members leave only by death (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989:5). They cannot resign or dissolve the system. The result is that "family" comprises the entire emotional system of at least three or four generations. In this way there is a "connectedness" in life.

Since family development "exists in the linear dimension of time," there are instances when the three or four generations must adjust to different life cycle transitions simultaneously. For example,

> "as one generation is moving toward older age, the next is contending with the empty nest, the third with young adulthood, forming careers and intimate peer adult relationships and having children, and the fourth with being inducted into the system" (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989:7).

As a result of the intermingling, changes in one generation may have a powerful effect on relationships at each other level. There is now evidence that family stresses, usually occurring around change points (predictable or otherwise), often create disruptions in the life cycle and may produce dysfunctions.

Although predictable changes create some stress, when predictable and non-predictable transitions intersect with family patterns, myths, secrets or legacies, there are quantum leaps in the level of anxiety and stress (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989: 9). In these instances, family members require help in coping with the situation and may need skill development in the areas of communication, decision making and problem solving.

The Changing Family Life Cycle

Changes in family life cycle patterns have increased dramatically within the past generation. These changes are caused by lower birthrates, longer life expectancy, the changing role of women and the increasing divorce and remarriage rate.

Child rearing now occupies less than half of adult life prior to old age. The result, according to Carter and McGoldrick (1989:11), is that the meaning of "family" has changed drastically.

The changing role of women has been central to changing life cycle patterns over time. No longer are women's identities determined primarily by the family functions of mother and wife, and linked to stages in child rearing. For women, career and family goals present more conflict than for men (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989:11). The changes in women's roles are central to the changing definitions of family and life cycle. Even predictable phases and transition points are now harder to define.

Our way of viewing the family (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989:12) "is currently more or less mythological, ... relating in part to existing patterns and in part to the ideal standards of the past against which most families compare themselves." The result is that it becomes more difficult to define the family and to provide appropriate solutions. Generalized, prescriptive solutions are not always "appropriate" any longer.

"Our way of viewing the family 'is currently more or less mythological, ... relating in part to existing patterns and in part to the ideal standards of the past against which most families compare themselves'."

Congruence and Continuity in Family Development

Value systems and cultural traditions determine to a large degree how children learn about family development. Incongruent development occurs when children are expected to be sheltered until the age of puberty or early adulthood and then expected to perform as adults in the same paradigm (view of the world) in which they functioned as children. Lewis and Lewis (1982:14) have observed that "Children ...are passive participants in activities for which they will be expected to assume responsibility, without more formal training or practice, at some magical age." That is, children are not generally expected to be productive nor to take responsibilities within the family. Rather, it is assumed that children should enjoy childhood while they can because they will soon have to learn about the responsibilities associated with being an adult. This approach tends not to include a phase for preparation for adulthood. Several questions then arise: when are children expected to learn responsibility? How does the transition occur if children do not learn in a more continuous fashion? We have witnessed many young adults who through lack of learned

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responsibility, lack of contribution to family life, and and unbalanced focus on their "individual rights" have disrupted family harmony.

These young adults are the products of discontinuous learning environments.

If the development of children is more congruent or consistent, we observe them taking a responsible role within the family, making some decisions for themselves consistent with family values, and solving some of their own daily problems just as adults do.

The problems of discontinuous learning and incongruent development in the western world are ongoing issues in individual and family development. Individuals and families can more easily manage predictable and non-predictable events if they learn from early childhood such skills as communication, problem solving, decision making (Arcus, 1987) and responsibility within the normal course of a day's events. Since these skills are usually minimized in our society, lifelong learning offers an opportunity to reorder and continue individual development while providing opportunities toprepare family members for coping effectively with change.

The concept of continuity in teaching and learning encourages behaviour and knowledge that does not have to be unlearned. At present, children are taught what they have to know only for the present. When that behaviour or knowledge is no longer appropriate or sufficient, the individual has to unlearn the old knowledge or behaviour and relearn at a new level. For example, young children may be taught that they should be seen and not heard. However, by their teen and young adult years, they are expected to formulate their own opinions and express them clearly.

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An alternative to incongruent development is the continuous learning and growth enhancing development recommended in the lifelong learning process. As humans, we learn and develop through stages in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Throughout these stages we are faced with new problems to solve and new situations to understand. The best preparation for continuous change is a continuous process in which we work toward developing a better sense of self, as individuals and family members.

Family Development and Lifelong Learning

Given that human development is a function of individual change and that individual change results from environmental change, (Inkles, On Becoming Modern) family development is also the result of the needs of the individual to change. We all feel the day to day pressures to respond to changes in our immediate environment with different behaviours and new attitudes. How then, do we change our behaviour? We change by choosing to learn something new in the hope of improving our situation.

Learning is an active process which involves the acquisition of new ideas, changing attitudes or developing or enhancing particular skills or behaviours. Our learning may be intentional or unintentional but it usually changes how we respond to situations.

Much of our learning is related to change in the tasks or roles which we perform on a regular basis. Many of these tasks or roles reflect our development as adults. For example, learning can help us to prepare for such changes as becoming independent, seeking and maintaining a livelihood, selecting a mate, learning to live with a mate, becoming and functioning as a parent, and, finally, preparing for death (Kidd, 1973:16).

"...learning can help us to prepare for such changes as becoming independent, seeking and maintaining a livelihood, selecting a mate, learning to live with a mate, becoming and functioning as a parent, and, finally, preparing for death."

Where do we learn? We learn in the workplace, in museums, in movie theatres, in social situations, watching television, in conversation with family members or colleagues, at conferences and seminars, reading newspapers and magazines, in places of worship and so on. How do we learn? We learn with the help of books, audio and video tapes, teleconference link-ups, computer systems, experiential exercises, discussions, experimentation and so on. We also learn through self-directed learning projects, through mentors and counselling, coaching, lectures, and reading.

"When do we learn? As adults, we reach the blended lifeplan stage where education, work and leisure are not distinct stages in life; they are activities which we are involved in concurrently."

When do we learn? As a society, we are now in the blended lifeplan stage where education, work and leisure are not distinct stages in life; they are activities which we are involved in concurrently. We no longer consider learning to be restricted to the period of formal schooling from six to eighteen years. We fit structured or deliberate learning as we can into our daily lives, while informal learning occurs incidentally and often unconsciously.

Why do we learn? We learn because our lives continue to change. We face rapid, sweeping global change and we need to learn in order to cope with new situations. We are part of an "information society", and lifelong learning is necessary if we are to keep abreast of the changes affecting our lives. Finally, we use learning as a family development tool because we aspire to the kind of strong families described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Strong Families

1. **Commitment.** Members of strong families are dedicated to promoting each other's welfare and happiness.
2. **Appreciation.** Members of strong families show appreciation for each other frequently.
3. **Communication.** Members of strong families have good communication skills and spend a lot of time talking with each other.
4. **Time.** Strong families spend time - quality time in large quantities - with each other.
5. **Spiritual weliness.** Strong families have a sense of a greater good and this belief gives them strength and purpose. This includes shared convictions about ethics, values, integrity, faith, etc.
6.

Source: Stinnett and DeFrain, Secrets of Strong Families. Little, Brown and Co. Boston, 1985.

Coping ability. Members of strong families are able to view stress or crises as an opportunity to grow.

Children and adults share behaviour change as the common outcome of learning, however adults are more goal oriented in seeking out structured learning situations. Children learn a great deal informally by observing and by asking "Why?". Adults also learn informally, but they frequently choose to learn in more structured ways through non-formal short courses or workshops, or through formal learning programs which lead to diplomas, certificates or degrees.

"Children learn a great deal informally by observing and by asking 'Why?'."

Barriers to Learning

Adults face several possible barriers when pursuing learning. The perceived barriers to learning are described in Figure 2 as identified by Cross and McCartan (1984:38).

Figure 2: Perceived Barriers to Learning (for adults)

Barriers	% of Potential Learners
Situational Barriers	
Cost, including tuition, books, child care,etc.	53
Not enough time	46
Home responsibilities	32
Job responsibilities	28
No child care	11
No transportation	8
No place to study or practice	7
Friends or family don't like the idea	3
Institutional Barriers	
Don't want to go to school full time	35
Amount of time required to complete program	21
Courses aren't scheduled when I can attend	16
No information about offerings	16
Strict attendance requirements	15
Courses I want don't seem to be available	12
Too much red tape getting enrolled	10
Don't meet requirements to begin program	6
No way to get credit or degree	5
Dispositional Barriers	
Afraid that I'm too old to begin	17
Low grades in past, not confident of my ability	12
Not enough energy and stamina	9
Don't enjoy studying	9
Tired of school, tired of classrooms	6

Source: Cross, K. Patricia and Anne-Marie McCartan, Adult Learning: State Policies and Institutional Practices. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Reports, 1984.

Don't know what to learn or what it would lead to	5
Hesitate to seem too ambitious	3

Fear of evaluation may also be a barrier for adults. That may be one reason for the popularity of non-formal learning activities. In non-formal learning situations, evaluation of learning is left to the individual based upon their desire to know the subject matter in order to create change. There are usually no exams or papers to be graded because adult educators believe that the individual can best measure the value of their own learning. Therefore, while formal learning situations use grades (which adults fear), non-formal and informal learning situations leave the evaluation of learning to the individual.

Although it does not constitute an obvious barrier to individuals, the lack of publications evaluating successful programs may result in the continuation of unsuccessful program designs. Generally, only those programs which have documented their implementation and effectiveness have the opportunity to impact policy makers striving to identify and foster successful family development programs and activities. There are many successful family development courses and programs operating in Alberta at present, though they may not be well known due to a lack of a common format or communication infrastructures for spreading the good news. Figure 3 describes five reasons for successful family programs.

"...in successful programs emphasis has shifted 'from a focus on changing the individual parent or child, to an emphasis strengthening the relationship and integration between them, and ...on reinforcing the relationship between the family and both formal and informal supports within the community'."

Weiss and Jacobs (1988:xxii) identify successful programs as those which successfully reflect the current trend toward more ecological intervention strategies. That is, in successful programs emphasis has shifted "from a focus on changing the individual parent or child, to an emphasis strengthening the relationship and integration between them, and ...on reinforcing the relationship between the family and both formal and informal supports within the community."

Figure 3: Reasons for Successful Family Programs

1. Programs are family oriented, not family focused, i.e. staff work with parents and children together.
2. Programs are developed to build on family strengths to empower parents.
3. Programs incorporate a service delivery philosophy where providers do things with, not to, families.
4. Programs are voluntary and parents have considerable latitude in determining the amount and nature of their involvement.
5. Programs incorporate recent trends and changes in human service delivery systems, including:
   a) distrust of some professionals;
   b) increased emphasis on service access, case coordination, and information and referral services; and
   c) movement toward more ecological intervention strategies, (i.e. on strengthening relationships between parent and child).

Source: Weiss, Heather B. and Francine H. Jacobs, Eds. Evaluating Family Programs. New York: Aldine De Gruyter. 1988:xxii.

A Lifelong Learning Strategies Model for Family Development

The model presented by the author of this paper in Diagram I proposes that lifelong learning has value as a preventive tool and as a promotional tool in family development. The model attempts to describe the current situation for families, the goals to be achieved by family development, a perspective of time and family life cycle, and the role of learning strategies, barriers and action plans in reaching family development goals.

"...lifelong learning has value as a preventive tool and as a promotional tool in family development."

As a preventive tool in family development, learning occurs at three levels. Primary prevention learning provides information to enable the family to avoid trouble. Secondary prevention involves one member (usually a parent) seeking out a learning opportunity, practicing a new behaviour and thereby instituting behaviour changes in all family members. Tertiary prevention occurs when the family is in serious trouble and outside intervention is needed to assist with learning through therapy to get the family functioning positively again. Learning as the basis for change in behaviour is the key to preventive family development activities.

Preventive learning may occur in three ways (Mace,1983:21):

1. Learning more about families through study and research, and spreading that information.
2. Training family members in "interpersonal competence."
3. Changing the cultural environment to provide social supports for families, as they are the foundation of our national life.

"These three components (provision of information, skill training, and social and environmental change) are all available in Alberta at present, although they may not necessarily be promoted as family development."

These three components (provision of information, skill training, and social and environmental change) are all available in Alberta at present, although they may not necessarily be promoted as family development. 'Learning for living' strategies are prolific in Alberta in informal, non-formal and formal learning opportunities. Many valuable courses and programs are offered by community based agencies, post-secondary institutions, government departments, private enterprise, further education councils, ACCESS Alberta, community schools, etc. which benefit individuals and families.

Other valuable forms of non-formal learning include: self-help groups; the Peer Support and Youth Leadership Program available to junior and senior high school students through the Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission; the Career and Life Management (CALM) program offered to high school students by Alberta Education; money management and other individualized learning programs offered by Consumer and Corporate Affairs; Career Development computerized career choice programs; Community School joint learning activities such as social responsibility classes and seminars on unemployment, stress and families; health unit preventive programs; and the PIN Magazine (Parent Information Network).

Non-formal learning also includes individual learning projects. In these instances, individuals seek out a variety of resources to meet their specific learning needs within the constraints of time, money and other conditions (Tough, 1979).

Many formal and non-formal business courses [which attract more men than women (Devereaux, 1983)] teach such skills as group dynamics, team building, small group leadership, project management, communications, building self esteem, etc. Each of these skill areas has value in family development. It is important that we pay attention to our ability to transfer and use these skills in family situations. Families cannot operate on management by objectives techniques, but some of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in the work place can be transferred and used in the family context. The ability to transfer skills from a variety of environments to the family situation can contribute significantly to the family's ability to cope with new challenges.

"Many formal and non-formal business courses teach...skill areas (which have) value in family development. It is important that we pay attention to our ability to transfer and use these skills in family situations."

The following list of courses provides an example of the offerings of community based agencies and institutions, through the Further Education Councils.

Building a Networking System
Emotional Pacemakers
The Art of Family Management
Marriage Preparation
Becoming an Effective Group Member
Nannies and Families
Living and Loving Your Teenager
Retirement Preparation
Living Through Loss
Encouraging Self-Esteem
Quality Day Care - Fact or Fiction
Talking to Teens
Remarriage - The Challenge
Anger and Discipline
Suicide Prevention for Teens
Step-Parenting
Transition to Junior High - Helping my Child Cope with Stress
You and Your Aging Parents - Are you Ready?

Depending upon the learning needs of the individual, these courses may provide preventive family strategies or promote individual well-being.

Apart from the individual perspective, family development needs to be viewed from an institutional or programming perspective. Albertans are fortunate to have 85 Further Education Councils responding to the learning needs of adults in their communities (see Diagram 2). In existence since 1972, the Further Education Program utilizes program grants to reduce the tuition costs to adult Albertans, thus enabling them to participate in a wide variety of short courses.

Further Education Council membership includes a variety of organizations, agencies and institutions involved in the delivery of adult education in a local community. Concerned citizens can also be active as council members. These council members provide learning programs in response to local needs, thus the learning options vary from one community to another. For example, courses identified above are further education council courses in family development.

The Community Programs Branch of Alberta Advanced Education which is responsible for the Further Education Program, indicate the following for Home and Family Life courses in their 1989 report.
Councils offering Home and Family Life courses: 76
Courses offered: 1867
Hours of instruction: 37,443.8
Average tuition fee/hour: $1.04
Average course fee: $21.00

Alberta's twenty-two post-secondary institutions are involved in the delivery of both credit and non-credit courses. The non-credit courses are usually delivered through one or more Further Education Councils. Credit courses and programs are delivered both on and off campus. Delivery of off-campus programs of study usually occurs through one of five Community Consortia, serving credit learning needs across Alberta without the need for establishing new post-secondary institutions. The five Community Consortia are: Big Country (Drumheller), Chinook (Blairmore), North Peace (Peace River), Pembina (Drayton Valley) and Yellowhead (Hinton) (see Diagram 3).

Community Consorita exist to meet the credit programming demands of areas not served directly by a university, college or technical institution. As a result of their program delivery, adult learners may be able to complete particular diploma, certificate or degree programs without leaving their home community. Subsidies provided to Consortia ensure that adult stduents pay the same tuition fee for the same credit program regardless of their on-campus or off-campus location.

Other programming strategies are found in the many programs offered by other government departments and agencies, non-profit organizations, and professional associations.

Conclusion

Individuals and family systems require the ability to manage predictable and non-predictable transitions in the family life cycle. Families require the ability to live with change and to develop a state of preparedness for changing life events. This preparedness is accomplished through individual readiness to use learning as a tool for changing behaviour.

This paper discusses family development through the description of life cycles common to families and the various learning strategies which families can adopt to develop as individuals and as family members.

The model of lifelong learning presented here is based on the premise of individual choice in pursuing learning as a tool for family development. Individual choice infers individual motivation and the desire to pursue learning to enhance self and family development. Adults present themselves as powerful role models for children when they are observed using learning as tool for change. As children come to understand that the continuous change around us produces the need for continuous behaviour change, they begin to see learning as a tool for coping with everyday situations, for increasing individual well-being and for enhancing personal empowerment.

"As children come to understand that the continuous change around us produces the need for continuous behaviour change, they begin to see learning as a tool for coping with everyday situations, for increasing individual well-being and for enhancing personal empowerment."

Adults and children can learn with and from each other, and benefit from respective changes in each others' behaviour. By choosing particular learning programs as they are needed, adults and children can determine the value of learning as a tool in the development of strong families and their ability to cope with social change.

Diagram 1: A Lifelong Learning Strategies Model for Family Development ©

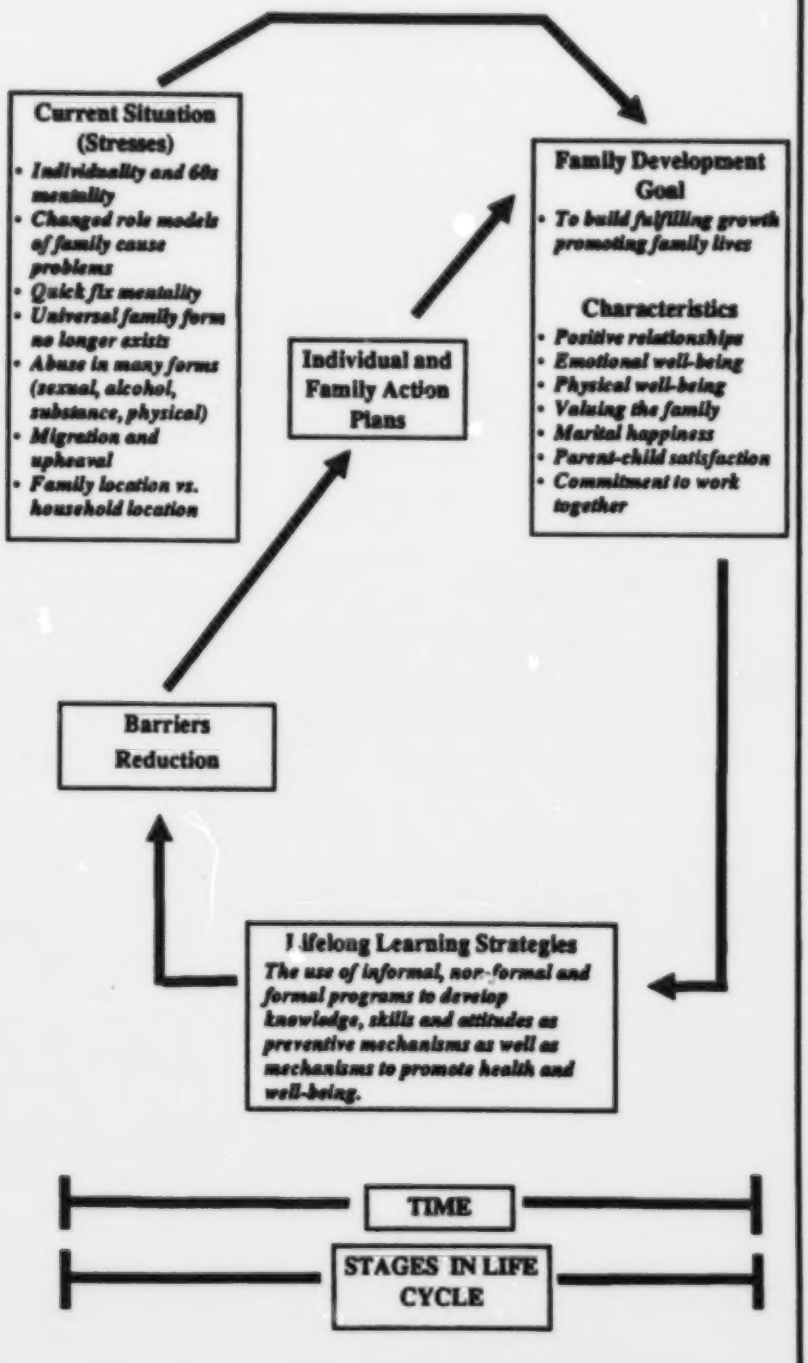
Current Situation (Stresses)
• Individuality and 60s mentality
• Changed role models of family cause problems
• Quick fix mentality
• Universal family form no longer exists
• Abuse in many forms (sexual, alcohol, substance, physical)
• Migration and upheaval
• Family location vs. household location
Individual and Family Action Plans
Family Development Goal
• To build fulfilling growth promoting family lives
Characteristics
• Positive relationships
• Emotional well-being
• Physical well-being
• Valuing the family
• Marital happiness
• Parent-child satisfaction
• Commitment to work together
Barriers Reduction
Lifelong Learning Strategies
The use of informal, non-formal and formal programs to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes as preventive mechanisms as well as mechanisms to promote health and well-being.
TIME
STAGES IN LIFE CYCLE

Diagram 2: Further Education Councils

Source: 1988-89 Alberta Advanced Education Annual Report

Diagram 3: Alberta Advanced Education Centres

Source: 1988-89 Alberta Advanced Education Annual Report

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